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Saber Strike 2011 concludes in Latvia

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ADAZI TRAINING AREA, Latvia – Saber Strike 2011, a multinational exercise, marked its conclusion with a closing ceremony today, following 12 days of intensive training. The exercise trained forces from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the 56th Stryker Brigade and U.S. Army in Europe units, including the 172nd Infantry Brigade and 16th Sustainment Brigade.

Soldiers trained on both Situational Training Exercises and Field Training Exercises in tasks such as convoy operations, cordon and search, urban patrol and base defense during both the STXs and FTX.

“Saber strike has been an outstanding success,” said Col. Keith Sledd, commander of the 16th Sust. Bde. and co-director of Saber Strike 2011. “The exercise has been a tremendous opportunity for us all to share and work together and to learn from one another.”

“I am sure that you are leaving Adazi with a better understanding of each other, better prepared, and if and when you meet in the fields of Afghanistan or any other place...you will understand each other better, you will be ready to work together,” said Jānis Sārts, the state secretary for the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Latvia, as he addressed the assembled Soldiers at the closing ceremony.

Col. Igors Rajevs, the Latvian exercise co-director, shared Mr. Sārts opinion. “There’s nothing more important than [the Soldier-to-Soldier relationship], because trust of your comrade with whom you are sitting in a foxhole somewhere in the [Forward Operating Base] in Kunar province in Afghanistan actually starts here. That’s how you build the trust between the different nations and the Soldiers of the different nations, trust and respect.”

Because Saber Strike 11 improved the relationship among Soldiers and units from different militaries, it consequently strengthened the partnerships and improved the relationships among the participating nations, according Sledd. “Saber Strike reflects a deepened partnership and a strategic partnership between the American, the Latvian, the Lithuanian, and the Estonian countries as well as their militaries.”

The Soldiers participating in the exercise echoed their leader's sentiments. "I think [Saber Strike 11] has been very successful," said Staff Sgt. Robert Garza, an infantryman for A company, 1-2 infantry, Task Force 3-66 armor, 172nd Infantry Bde. Garza said training with other units and previewing their tactics and opinions to assist his troops improve has been among the greatest benefits of Saber Strike 2011. "Like they say, 'it's always better to see from the outside in, rather than the inside out,' so other people grade you during different scenarios, different missions. It's a good tool. [Soldiers] are also learning from somebody else, something different. It's something they can take onto the battlefield to take the fight to the enemy."

1st Lt. Daniel Britt, an infantry platoon leader with B company, 1st Battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, said he found Saber Strike 11 a rewarding experience, especially for his platoon. Britt said the exercise was a great success and emphasized the value of not only learning from the other nations at Saber Strike 11, but the opportunity for his platoon to interact with its newest members in a foreign training environment.

"The opportunity to cross-train with the other nations, getting an appreciation of how they perceive themselves and how they perceive the U.S. was excellent. All my Soldiers were able to work together, about half of whom are new since the unit came back from Iraq. It was a great first opportunity for them to work with other nations," said Britt.

Learning something new was a common experience for the Soldiers at Saber Strike 11, even for those who have years of experience in the U.S. Army. "[Saber Strike 11] has taught me a lot about training with the Latvians and other foreign countries," stated Sgt. Maj. Sam Tidwell, a 28-year veteran of the U.S. Army and the S3 sergeant major for the 16th Sustainment Bde.

Saber Strike 11 is the first of a series of exercises to be conducted in the Baltic States which are scheduled over the next three years. The next exercise is scheduled to be held in 2012 in Estonia with the culminating exercise in the series in 2013 in Lithuania.



ADAZI TRAINING AREA, Latvia - Soldiers from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and the United States take part in the closing ceremony to mark the end of Saber Strike 11. (U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. Stephen A. Gober)